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How to Reduce Violence in Guerrero

"Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence" Briefing Paper Series

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How to Reduce Violence in Guerrero

By Víctor Manuel Sánchez Valdés[1]

Introduction

Guerrero is one of the most violent and dangerous states in Mexico. According to the latest data published by the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP), Guerrero had the second-highest rate of intentional homicide in the country for 2014[2], with 1,394 intentional homicides taking place between January and November of 2014. Guerrero's intentional-homicide rate is only outnumbered by the State of Mexico's. However, the SESNSP's data only compares absolute numbers. The State of Mexico has a larger population, and if the homicide rate is calculated per 100,000 inhabitants, Guerrero actually has the highest rate of intentional homicide per capita in Mexico, with 41.1 intentional homicides per 100,000 inhabitants[3]. Worse so, this has been a sustained trend, with Guerrero holding the same place for the last three years.

From 2004 to 2012 the intentional-homicide rate consistently increased: 539 intentional homicides were registered in 2004. Only five years later, in 2009, the intentional-homicide rate surged to 1,431. Finally, 2012 saw a historical high, with 2,310 intentional homicides. While this trend tapered off in 2013 and 2014, Guerrero's homicide rate is still well above the national average[4].

Most of these homicides are concentrated in the following municipalities: Acapulco, Chilpancingo, Iguala, Zihuatanejo, Atoyac de Álvarez, Ometepec, Coyuca de Catalán, Coyuca de Benítez, Técpan de Galeana, and Tlapa de Comonfort. In fact, Acapulco has been the city with the highest homicide rate in Mexico for the last three years. For example, from January to November of 2014, a total of 526 intentional homicides took place, while another 1,170 were committed in 2013. Even more warning, the majority of these homicides have gone unpunished—only 24 of the homicides that took place in 2013 were resolved with the guilty parties charged, thus, 97.95 percent of 2013's homicides are still unpunished[5].

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2 Does not include data for December 2014, as reports on said month have yet to be processed.

3 Rates were calculated based on data in registries for common offenses, as published in the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System archives, available here: http://secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/incidencia-delictiva/incidencia-delictiva-fuero-comun.php

4 *Ibid.*

5 Macías, Verónica (2014), "Tres municipios con desastrosas tasas de impunidad" in el Economista newspaper, Mexico

A few other high-impact crimes have been on the rise for several years. For instance, kidnapping rates have been on the rise since 2005, when 19 cases were reported. By 2009, Guerrero's kidnapping rate had increased to 51, reaching 207 by 2013. A similar trend can be observed for extortion. In 2005, a total of 31 extortion cases were reported. By 2009, 69 cases had been reported, while 2013 registered 174 cases[6]. It is worth noting that these rates correspond to reported crimes—however, according to the 2014 National Survey on Victimization and Public Security Perceptions (ENVIPE), 96.7 percent of Guerrero's crimes are not reported, meaning that Guerrero's true kidnapping and extortion rates could be significantly higher.

Guerrero's crime rate for 2013 is a matter of great concern, especially when taking non-reported crimes into account. Specifically, the 2014 ENVIPE survey estimates that 1,198,471 crimes took place in 2013, with 26 percent of Guerrero's inhabitants being victims of crime at least once. Furthermore, a considerable number of people were victims more than once. The fact that 49 percent of illegal acts committed in the state involved a firearm is also worrisome, as it means that inhabitants' lives and bodily integrities are at stake[7].

Guerrero is also among Mexico's top drug-producing states. In fact, Guerrero is the state with the largest poppy crop in Mexico, which is used to extract opium gum and heroine. The state also has one of the highest marijuana-producing rates in the country. To assess the sheer quantity of drugs being produced in Guerrero, we may observe the plantation-eradication efforts Mexican authorities have undertaken in the last few years. From January 2000 to October 2014, federal and state authorities destroyed 129,904 hectares of poppy fields and 31,858 hectares of marijuana fields. Notably, at least one marijuana or poppy field was found in each of the state's 81 municipalities. However, most of the eradicated marijuana fields were located in the Costa Grande and Tierra Caliente regions—specifically in the municipalities of Coyuca de Catalán, General Heliodoro Castillo, Petatlán, San Miguel Totolapan, and Técpan de Galeana. Meanwhile, most of the destroyed poppy fields were in the Centro, Costa Grande, Tierra Caliente, and Montaña regions—particularly in the municipalities of Atlixtac, Chilpancingo de los Bravo, Coyuca de Catalán, General Heliodoro Castillo, and San Miguel de Totolapan[8].

City, February 16, 2014. Available here: http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2014/02/16/tres-municipios-desastrosas-tasas-impunidad

6 Data taken from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, available here: http://secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/incidencia-delictiva/incidencia-delictiva-fuero-comun.php

7 National Survey on Victimization and Public Security Perceptions 2014 (ENVIPE), INEGI. Survey data corresponds to the year 2013.

8 This information was published in notice SJAI/DGAJ/11782/2014 from December 2, 2014, by which the Attorney

The state's dangerous conditions are adversely affecting inhabitants' safety: 78.9 percent of persons residing in Guerrero feel unsafe living there[9]. Meanwhile, fewer and fewer tourists visit the state each year, despite the fact that tourism is the state's top productive activity. In 2006, the state's average hotel occupancy was at 54.8 percent, dropping to 46.7 percent by 2013, regardless of the fact that fewer hotel rooms were available in 2013 than in 2006[10].

One of the most pressing issues for the state's security situation may very well be that the authorities responsible for law enforcement are part of the problem rather than part of the solution. This was made evident when 43 students from the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa were forcefully disappeared on September 26, 2014. Iguala's municipal police officers, together with the municipality's mayor, actively participated in the event in collusion with the criminal organization Los Guerreros Unidos, which was allowed to operate in the area in exchange for bribes.

In light of the gravity of the issues at hand, this article will aim to answer two closely related questions: Why did violence in Guerrero escalate over the last few years, and what can citizens and the authorities do to check the state's worrisome levels of violence? In response to these questions, the article will conduct an in-depth study of each of the factors that have contributed to the spike in violence Guerrero has faced over the last few years. In addition, the article will provide several public-policy recommendations to help check and reduce Guerrero's violence levels in the medium term.

The article is divided into five sections, in addition to the introduction. The first section will analyze the features that characterize Guerrero's criminal organizations, with a special focus on each organization's zones of operation and range of illegal activities. The second section analyzes the factors that have contributed to violence in Guerrero, such as the presence of guerilla groups in several areas of the state, the surge of self-defense and communitarian-police forces, corruption in bureaucratic and political structures, and the use of force in resolving political disputes. The third section will examine the instruments and institutional capacities that state and municipal authorities can use to check the state's security issues. Subsequently, the fourth section will outline civil society's efforts to tackle Guerrero's security problems. Finally, the fifth section will provide several public-policy recommendations to check the increasing levels of violence in the state.

General's Office (PGR) replied to public record request letter 0001700283314, which the author sent via the INFOMEX system.

9 ENVIPE 2014, INEGI.

10 This informtion was published in the Secretariat for the Promotion of Tourism in Guerrero's reply to public record request letter 00171814, which the author sent via the INFOMEX system.

Which Criminal Organizations Operate in Guerrero?

Guerrero is the Mexican state with the highest number of criminal organizations operating in its territory. Federal authorities and several media outlets have identified up to 10 independent criminal organizations that are present in at least 65 of the state's 81 municipalities. These organizations fight each other for control over the state's municipalities and illegal markets. A brief description of the 10 criminal organizations is presented here[11]:

- **Los Rojos:** This group operates in 37 of the state's municipalities[12], most of which are located in the Centro, Norte, and Montaña regions. Los Rojos are especially influential in Chilpancingo, Chilapa, Huitzuco, Leonardo Bravo, General Heliodoro Castillo, Olinalá, and Tixtla. The group grows and commercializes poppy and marijuana, but also carries out kidnappings, extortion, drug trafficking, and small-scale drug sales. The group's members originally belonged to the Beltrán Leyva[13] Organization, but gained operative independence under the name Cartel de la Sierra in 2009 (changing their name to Los Rojos later on). Still, the group continues to participate in several illicit Beltrán-Leyva deals. Los Rojos are also active in several municipalities in the state of Morelos, and used to operate in the State of Mexico as well.

- **La Familia Michoacana:** This criminal group is present in 31 of Guerrero's municipalities; however, the group fuses several local bands together to carry out kidnappings and extortion, with each band operating in its own territory. La Familia Michoacana was one of Guerrero's top-two criminal organizations in 2007, together with the Sinaloa Cartel. However, most of its members left the organization to join Los Caballeros Templarios in 2009. At that time La Familia Michoacana lost territory and influence over several illicit operations, including poppy and marijuana trade. Data on how many municipalities the group operates in can be misleading, since other criminal groups have gained control over several municipalities in

11 Other criminal groups have operated in Guerrero in the past, such as Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel, the Milenio Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, the Tijuana Cartel, the Díaz Parada Organization, Los Negros, Los Pelones, Los Marquina, the Édgar Valdez Villarreal Organization, and Los Zafiros. However, most of these groups have disappeared, while others ceased operations in the area and others only sporadically operate in the state; thus, these groups will not be mentioned in this section.

12 The author used several newspaper sources to identify the number of municipalities in which each criminal organization is present. Specifically, the author looked for newspaper articles on each of Guerrero's municipalities; when any of these pointed to the presence of a criminal group in the area, the author looked for at least one more article confirming the information, allowing for data comparison. All of the articles used as sources were published in 2013 and 2014.

13 This drug-dealing organization was founded by the Beltrán Leyva brothers in 2008, when they broke off from the Sinaloa Cartel. The group peaked in 2008 and 2009, but after its original leader, Arturo Beltrán Leyva, was captured in late 2009, the organization underwent a fragmentation process and 14 new criminal groups were created, of which six are still present in Guerrero.

which La Familia Michoacana makes regular incursions.

- **Los Guerreros Unidos:** This group is present in 30 of the state's municipalities. Its sphere of influence encompasses three regions, Centro, Norte, and Tierra Caliente, with most of its operations focalized in the municipalities of Iguala, Coyuca de Catalán, Apaxtla, Cuetzala, and Ciudad Altamirano. Poppy growth constitutes the group's main source of income, together with opium-paste and heroin sales. The group also participates in kidnapping, extortion, small-scale drug sales, and marijuana harvesting. Los Guerreros Unidos was created after the splitting of the Beltrán Leyva Organization, which had fed off of ex-La Familia Michoacana members for years. Los Guerreros Unidos is also present in several municipalities in the state of Morelos and the State of Mexico.

- **Los Caballeros Templarios:** This group regularly operates in 18 municipalities in the Costa Grande and Tierra Caliente regions. However, the group's position has weakened over the last year, since several of its leaders have been captured and killed. The group now has to fight to maintain control over several of its municipalities of operation, which are now being contested by the Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación and Los Granados. Los Caballeros Templarios participate in the following illicit activities: poppy and marijuana harvest, synthetic drug fabrication, extortion, piracy sales, merchandise theft, kidnapping, small-scale drug sales, and drug trafficking.

- **Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación:** This group has recently extended its operations into Guerrero. The cartel started by making sporadic incursions into Guerrero municipalities bordering Michoacán, but established a more permanent presence as of 2014. The organization currently operates in 10 municipalities in Costa Grande and Tierra Caliente, where it is fighting Los Caballeros Templarios for control over several poppy and marijuana-producing areas.

- **Cártel Independiente de Acapulco:** This organization focuses its operations in Acapulco, but is also present in nine municipalities in the Costa Chica region. The group carries out small-scale drug sales, operates prostitution rings, and extorts businesses and stores in Acapulco's Metropolitan Area. The group emerged from the Beltrán Leyva Organization and was part of the Édgar Valdez Villarreal criminal ring for a few months. When Valdez was captured, however, the group continued operations independently.

- **La Barredora:** La Barredora is also known as “Comando del Diablo”. The organization operates in 10 municipalities in the Costa Chica region of Guerrero, even though most of its operations take place in Acapulco. The group participates in small-scale drug sales, nightclub administration, prostitution-ring operation, extortion, and kidnapping. They initially belonged to the Beltrán Leyva Organization and later joined the Cártel Independiente de Acapulco (CIDA). In 2010 they broke off to form their own organization, while creating an alliance with the Sinaloa Cartel, by which they would challenge CIDA for control over Acapulco's Metropolitan Area as well as other illicit markets in the region. It is important to note that La Barredora has lost much of its structure over the last two years.

- **Los Ardillos:** This group is present in eight municipalities in the Centro and Montaña regions. However, Los Ardillos' main center of operations is located in the town of Tlanicuilulco in the Quechultenango municipality, where it formerly participated in a drug-production and trafficking ring under the Beltrán Leyva Organization. However, the group has been operating independently since 2009. The group initially focused on extortion and kidnapping, but eventually went back to marijuana and poppy harvesting. The authorities uncovered a Los Ardillos heroin-producing laboratory last year.

- **Los Granados:** This group is also a product of the Beltrán Leyva Organization's fragmentation. More concretely, Los Granados was a Beltrán Leyva cell operating in Técpan de Galeana and several other municipalities in the Costa Grande region. The cell gained independence after Arturo Beltrán was captured in 2009. The organization is currently present in six Costa Grande municipalities, where it harvests poppy and marijuana crops. Last year, Los Granados became allied with Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación to tackle the Los Caballeros Templarios cells operating in the Costa Grande region.

- **Sinaloa Cartel:** For many years, this was Guerrero's most powerful criminal group. The cartel started operating in Guerrero via the Beltrán Leyva brothers. However, the Sinaloa Cartel's presence was greatly reduced when it decided to become independent[14], since most regional cells decided to stay true to the Beltrán Leyva Organization. Currently, the Sinaloa Cartel is only directly present in two Costa Grande municipalities (Petatlán and Técpan de Galeana), where it grows poppy and marijuana crops. The Sinaloa Cartel is also indirectly present in Acapulco and Costa Chica via its alliance with La Barredora—even though the latter is fully

14 The Beltrán Leyva brothers broke off from the Sinaloa Cartel in 2008, suspecting that the Sinaloa Cartel had turned Alfredo Beltrán in before Mexican authorities. Thus, the brothers decided to create their own group.

independent.

As the above paragraphs show, many of these criminal organizations stem from the fragmentations larger drug cartels have undergone over the last few years. More specifically, the structure of Guerrero's criminal organizations is a direct consequence of the changes the Sinaloa Cartel (especially in the branch known as the Beltrán Leyva Organization) and the Familia Michoacana have undergone. Indeed, a series of conflicts in the two organizations' upper echelons ended up segregating many of the units operating in Guerrero, which were forced to create smaller criminal organizations at the regional level.

The surge of smaller organizations in this very limited territory brought about several changes in Guerrero-based criminals' *modus operandi*. While a drug cartel can withstand losing control over a municipality—as it dominates a much larger amount of territory—a regional organization has to defend its municipality at all costs, as each municipality accounts for a much larger percentage of its income, and losing it could cause the organization to become extinct. This is why smaller groups have become increasingly violent while gaining more incentives to co-opt and corrupt local authorities, especially police units—without police cooperation, criminal groups would hardly be able to prevent rival groups from encroaching upon their territories.

Another important change to consider is that these regional cells' earnings were significantly reduced when they stopped participating in high-income activities, such as drug trafficking for the United States. Many of these organizations continue to harvest and manufacture drugs, but no longer have access to the US-Mexico border. Thus, they have begun selling their products to larger intermediary organizations, which keep most of the profit.

The decrease in Guerrero-based criminal groups' earnings has led them to diversify their range of illegal activities as a way to replace previous sources of income. The main issue with this trend is that many of these activities require intensifying violence. For instance, when it comes to business extortion, those who refuse to pay right-to-rent fees need to be taught a lesson; otherwise, business owners will quickly stop paying up. Indeed, implementing right-to-rent fees requires public violence that will send a message to other extortion victims. In contrast, drug-trafficking activities are usually carried out as discretely as possible in order to avoid drawing the authorities' attention.

It would be fair to say that the most transcendent change brought forth by the surge in small criminal groups is that many of the areas of influence where criminal groups operate have begun to overlap. In

fact, a total of 47 municipalities have more than one criminal organization operating in the area, of which 21 have three or more criminal groups. Furthermore, municipalities such as Chilpancingo, Coyuca de Catalán, Pungarabato, San Miguel Totolapan, Técpan de Galeana and Zirándaro have registered five or more criminal organizations in their territories.

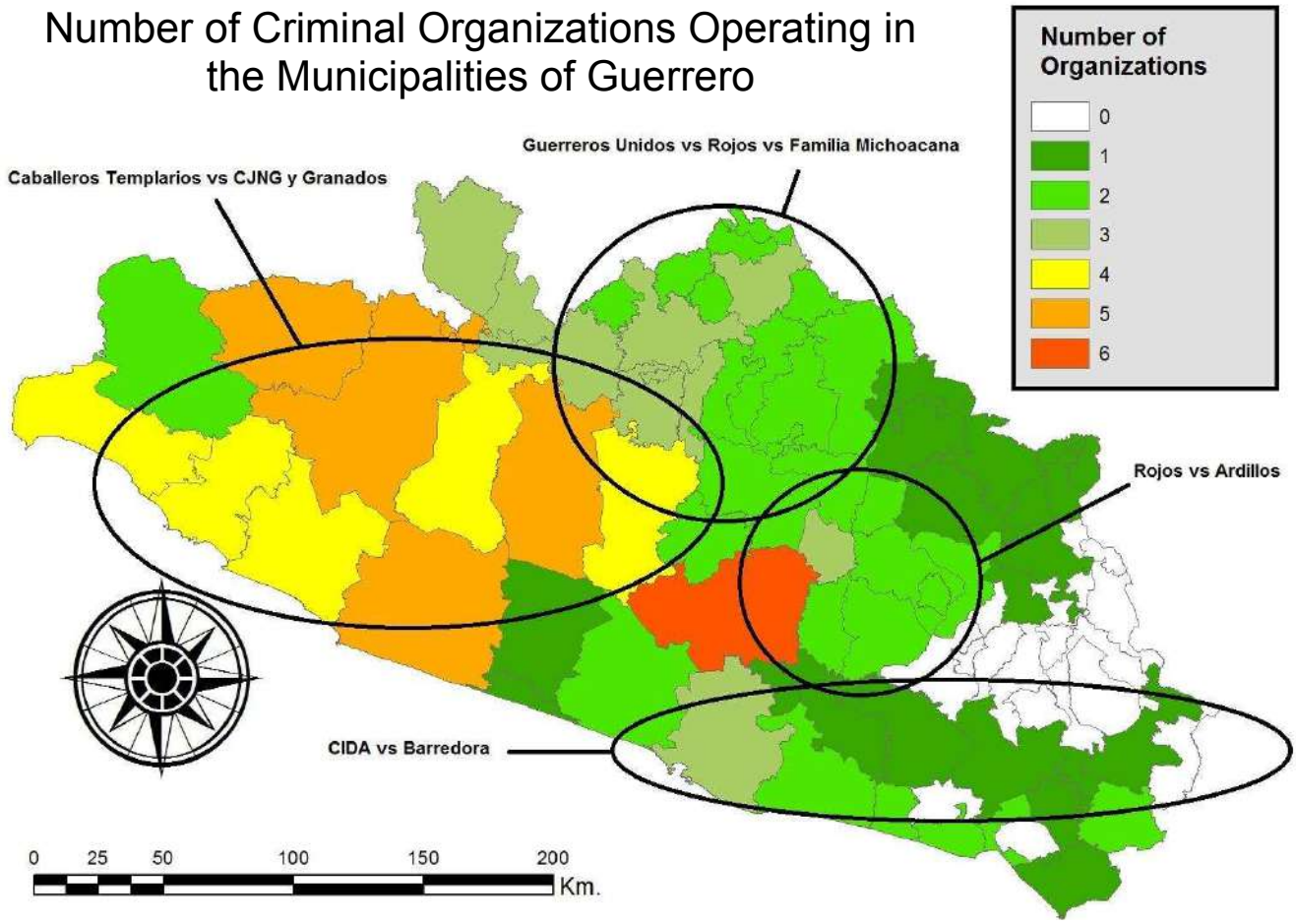

Illustration 1: Number of Criminal Organizations Operating in the Municipalities of Guerrero. (Prepared by author based on newspaper sources)

This has provoked confrontations among groups seeking control over the municipalities. We can categorize these incidents into four main conflicts. The first constitutes the fight for control over the Tierra Caliente and Costa Grande regions, which were under Los Caballeros Templarios' control just a few months back. When the federal government implemented Plan Michoacán and deployed hundreds of federal agents to the aforementioned regions, Los Caballeros Templarios' earnings dropped. At the same time, most of the group's leaders were captured, weakening the cartel's organizational structure. Since then, Los Caballeros Templarios has lost several territories to its rivals, especially to the Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación. Turf wars over the Tierra Caliente and Costa

Grande regions have persisted between what is left of Los Caballeros Templarios in Guerrero, and an alliance led by the Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación, which also includes Los Granados.

The second regional conflict is taking place in Acapulco and in the Costa Chica area. This conflict involves the Cártel Independiente de Acapulco and La Barredora, which, in practice, represents the Sinaloa Cartel's interests in the region. These two organizations aim to control several activities in Acapulco's Metropolitan Area, such as small-scale drug sales; prostitution-ring operations; right-to-rent fees in nightclubs, hotels, casinos, and local businesses; and piracy in the port of Acapulco.

The third area being disputed by several criminal organizations includes the Centro and Norte regions, as well as several municipalities in Tierra Caliente. Specifically, three criminal organizations are fighting each other for control over the area: Los Guerreros Unidos, Los Rojos, and La Familia Michoacana. This area is particularly relevant as it is not only one of the main poppy- and marijuana-producing municipalities in the region, but is also a transit zone between Michoacán, Morelos, Mexico City, and the State of Mexico.

Lastly, the fourth conflict involves Los Rojos' dispute with Los Ardillos. The two groups are fighting over land in the part of the Centro region that is adjacent to the Montaña region. As in many of the above cases, the fight stems from both organizations' desire to control an area that produces a significant amount of poppy.

In conclusion, much of the violence Guerrero suffers today is caused by conflicts between criminal groups, or between the authorities and said groups. However, as will be described in the next section, several other factors have contributed to violence in the state.

Other Risk Factors for Public Safety in Guerrero

Guerrero's high levels of violence are not solely a product of criminal organizations' activities in the area. Several other factors negatively affect the state's stability, such as guerilla organizations' operations in several parts of Guerrero; the formation of self-defense groups and communitarian-police forces, which are present in several of Guerrero's municipalities; the use of force as a way to resolve political disputes; and corruption, which has affected public officials and police forces throughout the state.

More than 10 organizations in Guerrero have used communiqués to publicly introduce themselves as guerilla groups, such as: Comité Clandestino Revolucionario de los Pobres-Comando Justiciero 28 de

Junio (CCRP-CJ28J), the Ejército Armado del Pueblo (EAP), the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR), the Ejército Popular Magonista (EPM), the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo Insurgente (ERPI), the Ejército Revolucionario de Insurgencia Popular (ERIP), the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias del Pueblo (FARP), the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias-Liberación del Pueblo (FAR-LP), the Milicias Insurgentes Ricardo Flores Magón (MI-RFM), the Movimiento Revolucionario Lucio Cabañas Barrientos (MRLCB), and Tendencia Democrática Revolucionaria-Ejército del Pueblo (TDR-EP). However, there is only evidence that three of these organizations—namely, the EPR, the ERPI, and the FAR-LP—maintain an armed presence in at least one of Guerrero's municipalities.

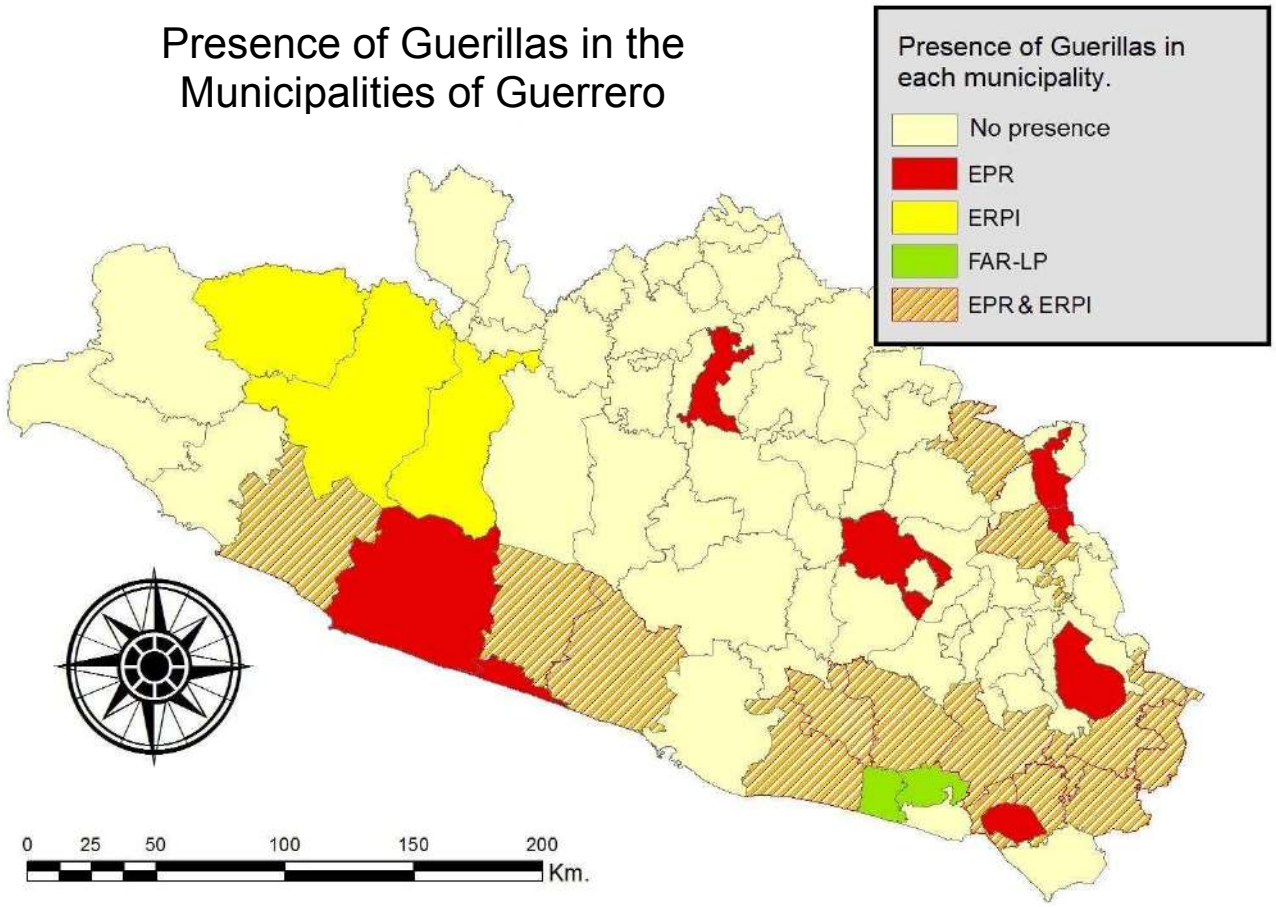

Illustration 2: Presence of Guerillas in the Municipalities of Guerrero. (Prepared by author based on newspaper sources)

The FAR-LP's presence is limited to two municipalities in the Costa Chica region, Cuautepec and Florencio Villarreal. Meanwhile, EPR operates in 22 municipalities in the Costa Chica, Costa Grande, Centro, and Montaña regions. Lastly, ERPI operates in 18 municipalities located in four separate

regions: Costa Chica, Costa Grande, Montaña, and Tierra Caliente[15].

Despite the amount of municipalities in which guerilla groups are present, the amount of attacks that can be attributed to these groups is much lower than the amount corresponding to members of organized crime. In fact, we could say that guerilla groups in Guerrero are idle most of the time, unless a specific event, such as the disappearance of the students from the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa, triggers guerilla groups to take up activities once again.

Another factor generating violence in Guerrero is the proliferation of self-defense groups and communitarian-police forces over the last few months. These groups' objective is to provide citizen vigilance and prevent criminal organizations from incurring in their communities. Unfortunately, some of these groups' members have committed human rights violations. The National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) has documented several instances of arbitrary arrests, vigilante justice, torture, and even murder among members of these groups[16].

In December of 2013, the CNDH presented a report stating that self-defense groups and communitarian police were present in 46 of Guerrero's 81 municipalities[17]. In the last few months, however, the count has risen to at least 53 municipalities[18].

These groups will be classified into several categories, as they all have different legal statuses. The first category comprises communitarian-police forces, which are recognized by Guerrero's legislation and receive financing from the state's government. This category can be divided into two main organizations. The first, the Regional Coordinator for Community Authorities (CRAC), is present in 21 municipalities, most of which are in the Montaña region. The second organization, the Union of Organized Towns in the State of Guerrero (UPOEG), operates in 23 municipalities located in the following regions: Costa Chica, Montaña, Norte, and Centro.

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15 Víctor Hugo Michel and Javier Trujillo (2014), “Guerrero: 'narco', guerrilla y bandas, en 62 municipios” published in Milenio newspaper on November 24, 2014. An additional scan of newspaper sources was conducted for each municipality. When news articles pointed to the presence of a criminal group in the area, the author looked for at least one more article confirming the information, so the data could be compared. All of the articles used as sources were published in 2013 and 2014.

16 Informe Especial sobre los Grupos de Autodefensa y la Seguridad Pública en el Estado de Guerrero (Special Report on Self-Defense Groups and Public Security in the State of Guerrero), National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), December 2013, Mexico City.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Newspaper sources were examined for each municipality. When news articles pointed to the presence of a criminal group in the area, the author looked for at least one more article confirming the information, so the data could be compared. All of the articles used as sources were published in 2013 and 2014.

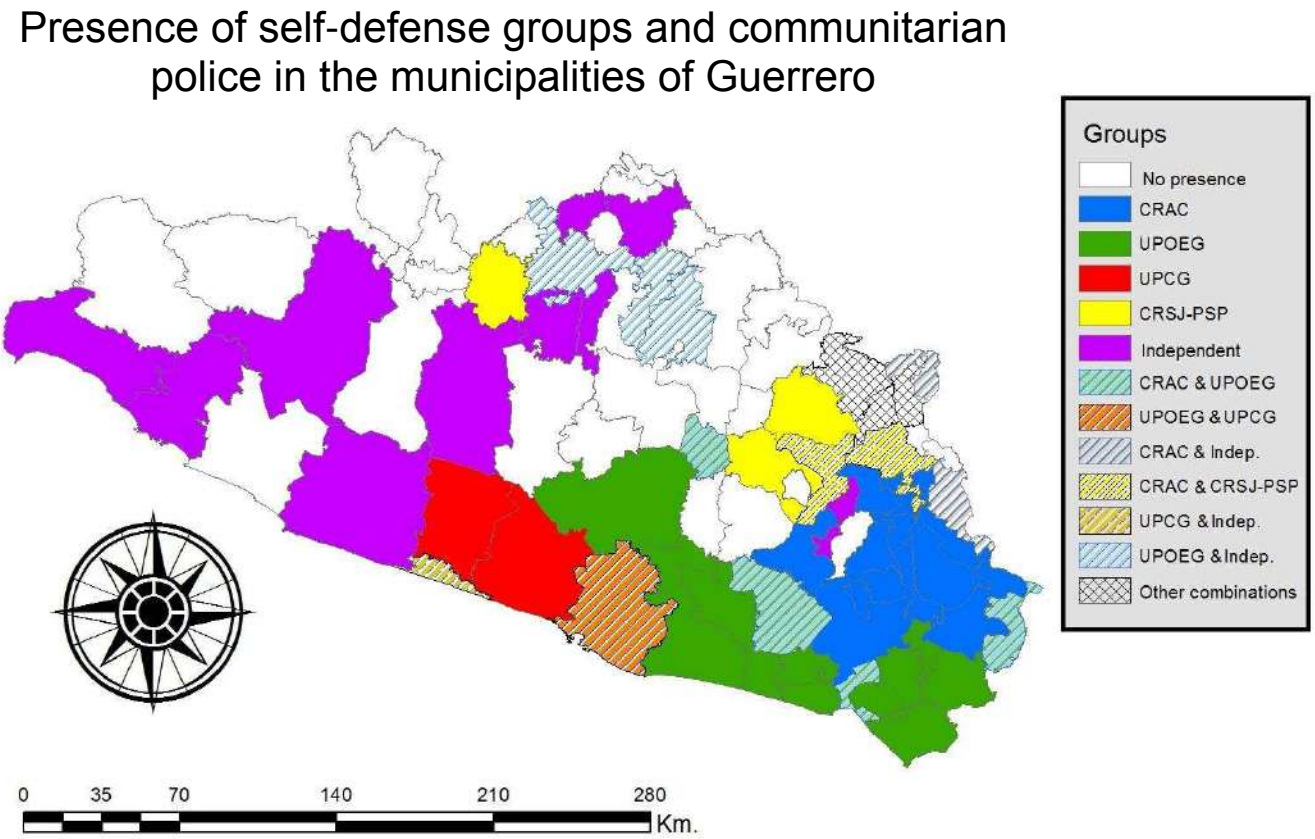

Illustration 3: Presence of self-defense groups and communitarian police in the municipalities of Guerrero. (Prepared by author based on CNDH 2013 and newspaper sources)

A second category corresponds to organizations that have not been legally recognized, but that are negotiating their inclusion in the communitarian police model. This category includes the Union of Towns in Costa Grande (UPCG), which is present in four municipalities in Costa Grande, and the Regional Coordinator for Security and Justice – Popular Citizen Police (CRSJ-PCP), which operates in seven municipalities in the Centro and Montaña regions.

Lastly, a third category includes the self-defense groups that have surged in recent months. Notably, these are not legally recognized and operate outside the law. Currently, self-defense groups like these have been identified in 20 municipalities located in all the state's regions, except Costa Chica.

Guerrero also has very high levels of political violence. In fact, it is one of the states with the highest rates of executions of public and political officials. From 2007 to now, at least 45 public servants have

been killed in this state, of which three were mayors[19]; three were former mayors[20]; one was President of the State Congress Armando Chavarría Barrera; another was PAN state-leader Braulio Zaragoza Maganda; and another was Federal Representative Moisés Villanueva de la Luz. Of the 45 assassination cases, Guerrero's State Attorney has only solved three[21]. Furthermore, it is worth noting that not all cases point toward criminal organizations. In fact, a considerable amount of these assassinations include suspects belonging to the political class or who work as public officials. This shows that Guerrero has a strong tradition of using force to resolve political issues[22].

Another risk factor is the infiltration of organized crime in political, governmental, and police structures in the state. It is no coincidence that the federal police have had to take control over security in 14 of Guerrero's municipalities[23], as the municipalities' police corporations were suspected to have been at the service of criminal organizations operating in the state.

A few notable cases that exemplify the relationship between criminal networks and the authorities may be observed. For instance, María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa, the former first lady of Iguala, had siblings that worked for the Beltrán Leyva Organization and for Los Guerreros Unidos. Bernardo Ortega Jiménez, the coordinator of the PRD in the local congress, is also an interesting case, as his father was the leader of Los Ardillos and several of his relatives still have ties to said criminal organization. Rogaciano Alba Álvarez, former mayor of the municipality of Petatlán, directly controlled the Sinaloa Cartel's activities in the Costa Grande region, and is now detained in a maximum-security prison.

Corruption among authorities and the political class is a clear trigger of violence. The fact that police corps and administrative authorities are co-opted by criminal organizations makes it impossible for officials to curb criminal activity. Thus, in practice, the authorities have become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. For this reason, an improvement in state surveillance and auditing mechanisms is much needed, as this could help identify corruption in a timely manner.

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19 Mayor Homero Lorenzo Ríos from the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres, Mayor José Santiago Agustino from the municipality of Zapotitlán Tablas, and Mayor Alfonso Rivera Cruz, also from Zapotitlán Tablas.

20 Mayor Germán Adame Bautista from the municipality of Atoyac de Álvarez, Mayor Francisco Javier Rodríguez Aceves from the municipality of Petatlán, and Mayor Enterbio Reyes Bello from the municipality of Copanatoyac.

21 This information was published in notice FGE/VPS/DGAJ/ITAIG/6796/2014, dated November 21, 2014, by which Guerrero's State Attorney's Office replied to public record request letter 00169914, which the author sent via the INFOMEX system.

22 *Ibid.*

23 These municipalities are Apaxtla, Arcelia, Buenavista de Cuéllar, Cocula, Coyuca de Catalán, General Canuto Neri, Iguala, Ixcateopan de Cuauhtémoc, Pungarabato, Pilcaya, San Miguel Totolapan, Taxco, Teleolapan, and Tlapehuala.

Tools for State and Municipal Governments to Tackle Safety Issues in Guerrero

The magnitude of Guerrero's safety issues means that both state and municipal governments need to have the resources, trained personnel, and legal powers to carry out their responsibilities. However, if we analyze the resources and capabilities that state and municipal governments are given, we may note that several institutional weaknesses need to be urgently addressed.

First of all, Guerrero's state and municipal administrations lack the required amount of police agents to address the high rates of violence affecting the state. According to the United Nations, the standard calculation for an adequate police force is 2.8 police officers per thousand inhabitants[24]. However, according to the 2014 National Census on Government, Public Safety, and State Penitentiary Systems, and to the 2013 National Census on Municipal and Delegation Governments, municipal and state police forces in Guerrero fall below this rate, with 2.3 police officers per thousand inhabitants[25].

Since state-police presence is not a constant throughout Guerrero, municipalities that only have their own police forces also need to be taken into account when analyzing these areas' public safety issues. Specifically, according to the 2013 National Census on Municipal and Delegation Governments, only five of Guerrero's 81 municipalities have the recommended amount of police officers. In accordance with the U.N.'s parameters[26], the 76 remaining municipalities do not have enough agents. For instance, the municipality of Acapulco, which is the most populated in the state, only has half of the required police officers. Chilpancingo, the state capital, only has 45 percent of the recommended amount of officers. The most extreme case can be observed in the municipality of General Heliodoro Castillo, which merely has 10 percent of the police officers needed to supervise the area[27].

The institutional weakness that characterizes Guerrero's police forces is not only manifest in the lacking amount of police officers, but also in the police forces' training. Of the 5,497 agents working in Guerrero's municipal police forces in 2013, 13 percent did not go to school or only completed

24 Goode, Steven (2010), "A Historical Basis for Force Requirements in Counterinsurgency", Parameters, vol. 39, number 2, p. 45-57.

25 This rate includes state-police agents and agents from all the municipal police bodies in the area.

26 These municipalities are Alpoyeca, Atlamajalcingo del Monte, Juan R. Escudero, Juchitán, and Xalpatláhuac. All of these municipalities have less than 25,000 inhabitants.

27 The calculations for the number of police officers per thousand inhabitants for each municipality, as well as the calculation of the deficit or surplus of police officers, was calculated according to data from the 2013 National Census on Municipal and Delegation Governments.

elementary school; 40.4 percent only studied up to middle school; 43.4 percent finished high school or attended a vocational school; and only 3 percent graduated college or completed a graduate degree[28]. The state police forces' academic situation is not much better, as 9.3 percent did not go to school or only completed elementary school; 43.74 percent only studied up to middle school; 40.2 percent finished high school or attended a vocational school; and only 6.6 percent graduated college or completed a graduate degree[29].

The agents' lack of academic preparation translates into their salaries, which are not high enough to cover the police officers' basic needs. According to the SESNSP, the average salary for a state-police officer in Guerrero was 7,736 pesos a month, which fell below the national average, at 9,250 pesos[30]. Municipal police forces also have low salaries, as 33.8 percent of Guerrero's municipal police officers earn less than 5,000 pesos a month; 64 percent earn between 5,000 and 10,000 pesos; and only 2 percent earn more than 10,000 pesos a month[31].

Police officers' salaries not only affect their living standards, but can also affect their propensity to incur in corruption—as corruption can provide police officers with an extra source of income. Criminal organizations have capitalized on the situation by purchasing police services, including the provision of information, the guaranteeing of police complicity in certain activities, preventing the government from meddling in criminal activities, or keeping rival groups out of specific areas.

Corruption inside Guerrero's police forces has been curbed with trust-control examinations, which are being applied to state and municipal police forces. These examinations include polygraph tests, medical exams, toxicology screens, psychological evaluations, and investigations into officers' socioeconomic statuses. The examinations are carried out in evaluation centers that have been approved by the SESNSP's National Certification and Accreditation Center.

Up until the last cut, which took place October 30, 2014, 100 percent of Guerrero's state and municipal police forces had undergone trust-control examinations. Only 24.4 percent of the municipal-police officers that took the tests did not pass, and were subsequently laid off or relocated to administrative

28 Prepared by author based on data from the 2013 National Census on Municipal and Delegation Governments.
29 Prepared by author based on data from the 2014 National Census on Government, Public Safety, and State Penitentiary Systems.
30 Executive presentation on state and municipal police salaries, SESNSP (2011). Available here: http://www.secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/work/models/SecretariadoEjecutivo/Resource/347/1/images/Salarios_de_Policias_2010_y_2011_210911.pdf
31 Prepared by author based on data from the 2013 National Census on Municipal and Delegation Governments.

positions. The same applied to the 14.4 percent of state-police officers that failed the tests[32].

However, the fact that municipal police forces in Iguala kidnapped 43 students from the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa and handed them over to members of the Los Guerreros Unidos criminal group, makes the trust-control examinations appear unreliable, as some of the officers that partook in the kidnapping had passed the tests[33].

We should also note the quality of the work tools police officers are given. There is no detailed information on Guerrero police forces' equipment conditions since no cross-sectional studies have been carried out on the matter. However, there is one study that can provide relevant information on the work conditions under which Guerrero's public security corporations operate: “Alcozauca, ser policía municipal en la Montaña de Guerrero” (Alcozauca: being a municipal police in Guerrero's Montaña Region).

This study analyzes municipal-police work in the municipality of Alcozauca, and includes data on the conditions under which many of Guerrero's municipalities operate. For instance, 85 percent of the surveyed police officers believe they do not have sufficient equipment for their job, since they are not provided with uniforms, bullets, or ballistic vests in a timely manner. Furthermore, 80 percent of the surveyed agents believe that their patrol vehicles do not get proper maintenance and almost always need more gas. Only 25 percent of police officers know which legal body regulates their actions. Furthermore, officers are not given professional career services and lack health services, too[34].

Perhaps the worst issue that Guerrero's public safety corps face is that citizens don't trust them. The company Parametría carried out a survey from March 10-23, 2013, and found that only 36 percent of Guerrero's inhabitants trust municipal police officers. Meanwhile, 36 percent of citizens trust the state police and only 28 percent have a positive opinion of agents from the State Attorney's Office[35].

This has a direct impact on the authorities' ability to fight crime, since according to the National

32 Executive presentation on trust control and personnel certifications from the Professional Career Services for Public Safety Institutions, SESNSP (2014). Available here: http://www.secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/docs/pdfs/certifiacion_acreditacion/PRESENTACION_07112014.pdf

33 Alzaga, Ignacio (2014), “El 75% de los policías de Iguala aprobó control de confianza... local”, in Milenio newspaper, Mexico City. October 10, 2014. Available here: http://www.milenio.com/politica/75-_de_policias_aprobo_control_de_confianza-Felipe_Flores_Velazquez-normalistas_0_386961336.html

34 Alcozauca: ser policía municipal en la Montaña de Guerrero (Alcozauca, being a municipal police in Guerrero's Montaña Region), Insyde, Fundar, Civil Monitor for Police and Security Corps in the Montaña Region and the Human Rights Center in the Tlachinollan Mountain, Mexico City. October 2014.

35 Survey on citizen's trust in Guerrero's institutions, Parametría, April 2013.

Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI)[36], 96.7 percent of crimes committed in Guerrero are not reported to the corresponding authorities[37]. In fact, this is the highest unrecorded crime rate in Mexico. This leads us to infer that many citizens do not actively participate in watching over their community—the fact that citizens distrust police officers keeps them from reporting the crimes they may have witnessed.

Guerrero's Citizenship as an Agent of Change

Over the last 15 years, several civil society agencies have been founded in Guerrero to demand that authorities fulfill their public safety obligations, protect human rights, and promote respect for rule of law. Some of these organizations stand out, such as the Collective Against Torture and Impunity, the Human Rights Center in the Tlachinollan Mountain, the José María Morelos y Pavón Regional Human Rights Center, the Commission of Human Rights, "The Voice for the Voiceless", the Civil Monitor for Police and Security Corps in the Montaña Region, the Citizen Observatory for Public Safety in Guerrero, the Citizen Observatory for Public Safety and Urban Governance in Acapulco, the Guerrero Network of Civil Organizations for Human Rights, and the Be Just to Be Free Association.

Nevertheless, these agencies' ability to influence Guerrero's public-safety agenda has been quite limited over the last few years. The government makes most of its decisions unilaterally and the authorities appear unwilling to take citizen demands seriously.

However, the disappearance of 43 students from the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa on September 26, 2014, has significantly boosted civil-society mobilizations in Guerrero, both to demand that the disappeared students are returned alive, and to hold authorities accountable for public safety in the state. Hundreds of protests, public gatherings, and marches have taken place from September 26 until now, demanding justice for the disappeared students and their families.

In addition, the disappearance of the 43 students has pushed civil society to launch several citizen initiatives to pressure the authorities into ensuring public safety. In light of the authorities' inaction in terms of looking for the disappeared students, the students' parents, some communitarian-police members, and several civil-society organizations have launched citizen search brigades and gone through four municipalities to look for clues as to where the missing students could be.

Notably, the disappeared students' parents and several civil society groups and news outlets have

36 National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI).
37 National Survey on Victimization and Public Security Perceptions (2014), INEGI.

been closely following the federal and state governments' moves toward finding the missing students and discerning exactly what happened in Iguala on September 26, 2014.

Nevertheless, some of the aforementioned protests have ended with acts of violence and confrontations between citizens and the authorities. Many of these protests have caused material damages, such as business looting, vehicle burning, and arson attempts in public buildings, including Guerrero's Government Palace, the Local Comptroller, the Labor Conciliation and Arbitration Council, and the State Congress building. Similarly, the manifestations have blocked highways, closed many streets, and hijacked tollbooths. Citizens have been kept from entering several public buildings and many people have been hurt.

Between October 24 and December 29, 2014, a group of citizens acting under the umbrella of the Popular National Assembly, which includes students, professors, union members, human-rights defenders, members of indigenous organizations, and communitarian police forces, took over 28 mayors' offices in Guerrero[38] in protest for the 43 students from the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa. Some of the offices are still under the Assembly's control.

The high rate of citizen participation in protests inside and outside Guerrero has helped give the students' disappearance a prominent position on the public agenda. However, the issue could be watered down as time goes by. Civil society in Guerrero should take advantage of its currently strong position to pressure the government into making specific security commitments.

Guerrero's civil society needs to find a way to use the powers it gained throughout the protests and manifestations to push for the legal and institutional changes that could help Guerrero's state and municipal governments resolve their public-safety and justice issues.

Citizen organizations should undertake significant efforts to create an agenda of key social demands to present before the government. The demands should not be limited to general notions; rather, they should address specific issues and operational processes, such as security protocols. The more specific the citizen recommendations, the higher the impact they can have.

38 Sergio Ocampo and Héctor Briseño (2014), “Tomadas 28 alcaldías por el caso Ayotzinapa” in La Jornada newspaper, Mexico City, December 29, 2014, p. 5. Available here: http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/12/29/politica/005n1pol.

Public Policy Recommendations for Guerrero's Public Safety Issues

- Building upon the issues that have been exposed in the article, this section provides a range of public-policy recommendations that can help federal, state, and municipal authorities contain and curb Guerrero's high rates of violence. It should be noted that many of these measures' effects will not become manifest in the short term, as the suggested processes will take time to mature and adapt to the state's specific conditions.

  The first public-policy recommendation is to design models to help authorities compile intelligence to support the fight against organized crime—if the federal and state governments had compared their information detailing Guerrero criminal cells' territories and activities, events like the disappearance of 43 students from the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa could have potentially been avoided.

  The Ayotzinapa case proves that federal authorities are not using their intelligence capabilities properly. If they had done so, they would have realized that Los Guerreros Unidos had a significant presence in Iguala and had in fact controlled the municipal police command for years. If the authorities had known, a focalized intervention could have been launched to purge Iguala's police forces.

  Information derived from intelligence techniques and police investigations is key to fighting organized crime, as it helps create appropriate strategies and make well-founded decisions. Thus, Mexico's Attorney General's Office, the National Security Commission, Guerrero's Secretariat of Public Safety and Civil Protection, and Guerrero's State Attorney Office should come together to create specialized groups focusing on criminal organizations. These groups should compile information on the criminal organizations' members, illicit activities, areas of operation, and crimes, as well as on the authorities with which criminal organizations interact. This will allow the authorities to counter criminal organizations more efficiently.

- The second recommendation is to prioritize the strengthening of Guerrero's police forces. President Enrique Peña Nieto's proposal to fuse municipal police forces into a single state-level command is insufficient, as it will not change the fact that Guerrero does not have enough police officers, or the fact that the officers are poorly equipped, unprepared, and receive meager salaries. There is also no guarantee that criminal organizations' corruption networks will stop influencing police officers.

Resources need to be invested in a way that maximizes their potential impact. For instance, a career service for police officers could be created to help officers develop professionally, while recognizing their merits and compensating their training with better salaries. Indeed, having well-trained police officers is key to creating a functional public-safety model.

- A third recommendation, which is closely tied to the previous one, is to professionalize and train communitarian-police members. Communitarian-police presence in several localities has significantly reduced crime their areas of operation. For instance, the area with the least organized crime corresponds to the area where communitarian police forces under the Regional Coordinator for Community Authorities (CRAC) are present, as seen in Illustration 4[39].

  The biggest problem that communitarian-police forces face is that they lack the training and the equipment to deal with day-to-day challenges. Special attention should be paid to preventing human-rights violations like those the CNDH reported in 2013 from happening again. Procedural protocols for the communitarian police should also be created in order to standardize the forces' responses toward commonly faced situations.[40]

39 The illustration shows the results of a Getis-Ord Gi* statistic to identify hot spots and cold spots in the distribution of a given variable, which, in this case, corresponds to the amount of criminal organizations present in each municipality. The maps show that muncipalities where the CRAC is present are those with a low cluster of criminal-organization rates.

40 Kyle, Chris (2015), "Violence and Insecurity in Guerrero", Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington DC, United States. Available here: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/violence-and-insecurity-guerrero

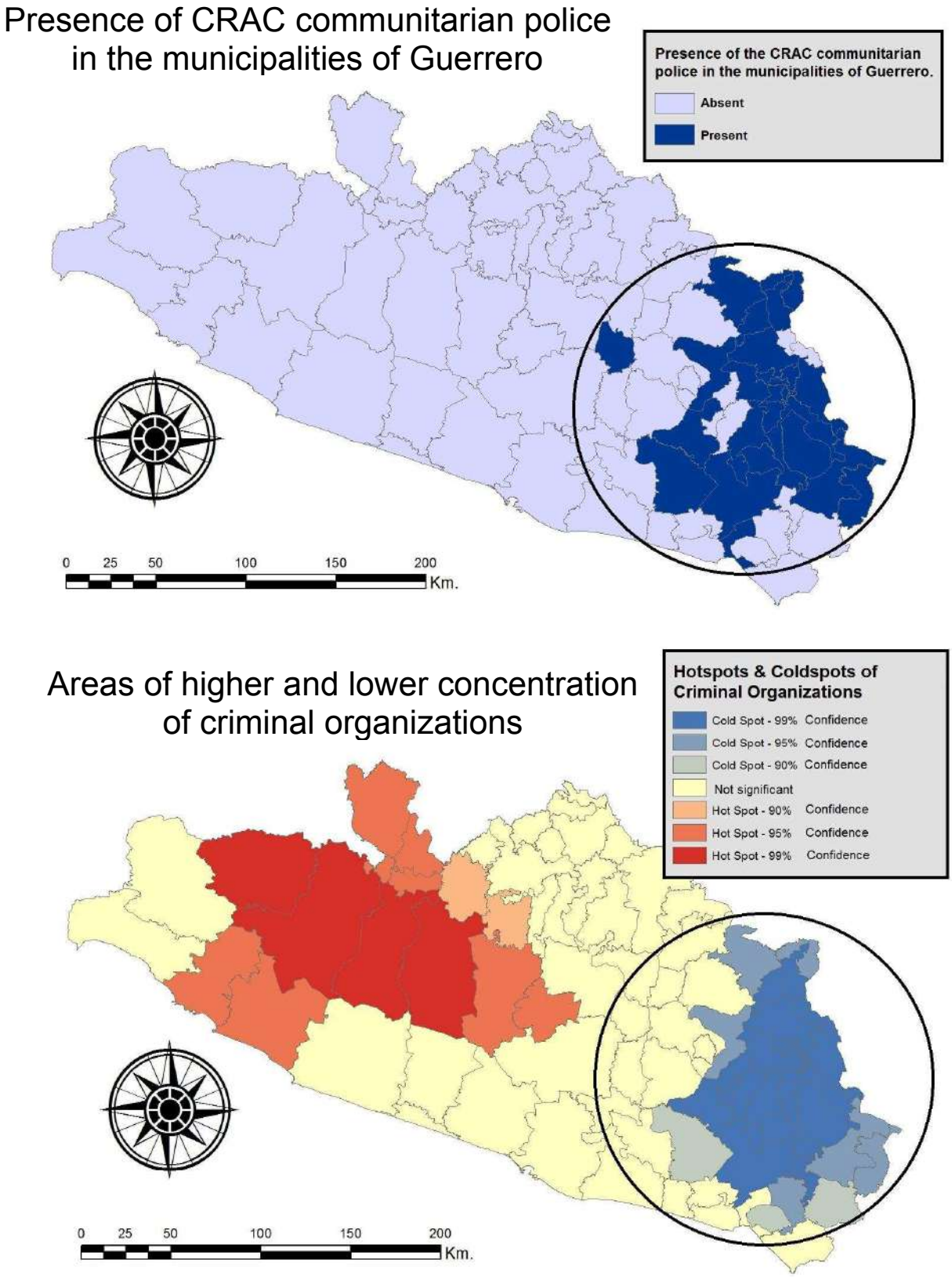
Presence of CRAC communitarian police in the municipalities of Guerrero
Presence of the CRAC communitarian police in the municipalities of Guerrero.
Absent
Present
0 25 50 100 150 200
Km.
Areas of higher and lower concentration of criminal organizations
Hotspots & Coldspots of Criminal Organizations
Cold Spot - 99% Confidence
Cold Spot - 95% Confidence
Cold Spot - 90% Confidence
Not significant
Hot Spot - 90% Confidence
Hot Spot - 95% Confidence
Hot Spot - 99% Confidence
0 25 50 100 150 200
Km.

Illustration 4: Presense of CRAC communitarian police in the municipalities of Guerrero. (Prepared by author)

- The fourth recommendation is to generate police-force surveillance and control models in which citizens can participate, as citizens tend to have first-hand information on the police forces' impact on their communities. Furthermore, citizens could provide relevant information on acts of corruption involving police forces.

  Mechanisms need to be implemented for citizens to safely and confidentially send information to police forces' internal affairs departments or to the authorities in charge of investigating acts of corruption.

  However, this will be no easy task. First of all, Guerrero's citizens do not trust the police, meaning that a vast amount of crimes are not even reported. Secondly, there is no guarantee that the authorities supervising police officers are not part of the corruption problem themselves. Thirdly, since many activist groups in Guerrero have been attacked, people are afraid of reporting corruption to the authorities. A system like this can take years to solidify, since citizens' trust needs to be regained, and this will only happened once the system starts producing positive results.

- A fifth and final recommendation is to enact social programs to improve the standard of living for population sectors that risk being recruited by organized crime. Indeed, work, education, and development opportunities could help deter these populations from joining criminal groups.

This is relevant because Guerrero is one of the most marginalized states in Mexico, and the population's lack of opportunities and precarious standard of living pushes people to participate in illegal activities. Migration toward illegal sectors could be avoided if there were enough decent work and development opportunities for everyone.

For instance, Oiendrila Dube, Omar García-Ponce, and Kevin Thom found a link between declining corn prices and an increasing rate of agricultural workers choosing to allocate part of their work to marijuana and poppy production. This, in turn, causes an increase in rates of violence in the areas where legal crops are substituted for illegal crops[41].

Resolving these issues as described in the above paragraph requires more than simply

41 Dube, Oiendrila; García-Ponce, Omar; and Thom, Kevin (2014), "From Maize to Haze: Agricultural Shocks and the Growth of the Mexican Drug Sector" in CGD Working Papers, number. 355, Center of Global Development, Washington DC, United States. Available here: http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lng=en&id=177334

implementing supplementary strategies, as the authorities have done with Progresa[42] and the National Crusade Against Hunger[43]. Rather, strategies need to directly impact the following two areas. Firstly, citizens need to have a legal production alternative via labor-support programs. Secondly, the jobs citizens get need to increase their incomes enough to cover their basic needs.

One viable strategy could be to implement crop-substitution programs, akin to those carried out in certain regions of Colombia. Authorities such as the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fishing, and Food; or the Secretariat of Rural Development in Guerrero; should offer agricultural workers that live off low-profit crops, such as corn, beans, or sorghum, the financial support to substitute these crops with more profitable crops that can grow under the same soil and climate conditions. This way, agricultural workers could increase their incomes without incurring in illegal activities.

A crop-substitution program would require a prior investigation period to analyze cross-sector prices for agricultural products that could grow in Guerrero's soil and climate conditions. This way, the authorities could select a variety of products to offer agricultural workers as an alternative to corn, beans, sorghum, and other low-profit crops. Furthermore, some agricultural workers could avoid completely switching crops by offering higher-priced products derived from those same crops. In this sense, Hellin *et. al.* (2013)[44] note that certain niche-market products make corn more profitable: blue corn; corn for pozole soup[45]; the fungus that grows on corn, known as Huitlacoche; and the corn leaf used to wrap tamales[46].

A crop-substitution program would need a few basic components. The first component involves the support that would be allocated to agricultural workers, either in kind or in cash, to make their land suitable for the new crop. For instance, this component could include providing seeds or plants, land preparation, purchasing agro-industrial equipment, providing supplies, assigning credits, and setting up subsidies for certain services.

The second component involves technical support—while Guerrero's agricultural workers know

42 Conditional-transfer program by which families receive economic support from the federal government ; in exchange, family members commit themselves to attending a health center for medical attention and sending their children to school.

43 Food assistance program for families to purchase highly nutritional food for below-market prices.

44 Hellin, Jon; Keleman, Alder; López, Damaris; Donnet, Laura; and Flores, Dagoberto (2013), "La Importancia de los Nichos de Mercado: Un Estudio de Caso del Maíz Azul y del Maíz para Pozole en México" in Revista Fitotecnia Mexicana, vol. 36, number. 6, p. 315-328.

45 Traditional Mexican dish.

46 Traditional Mexican dish.

how to harvest corn, beans, sorghum, and other low-profit products, they may be unfamiliar with the new crops. Thus, a new follow-up strategy should be implemented, by which agricultural advisors regularly visit agricultural workers to provide recommendations regarding the harvest process as well as ways to access government support programs. In order to build an agricultural-advisor network, federal and state authorities could forge alliances with regional universities, which could connect young people with the expertise to serve as agricultural advisors.

The third component involves access to fair-trade networks. This component could be combined with the previous one—technical support could include providing information on the most convenient trade routes in order to prevent intermediaries from taking hold of most of the profits.

However, it should be noted that no crop can provide a higher profit per hectare than poppy or marijuana. Still, a crop-substitution program could offer agricultural workers an attractive alternative, as their profits would increase without them having to take up the high-risk activities that poppy and marijuana harvesting entail.